

I GREW UP INTO A MAN

Life began for me in the monastery.

I was 13 then ...
all the years before a blur.

Oh, I remember things.

Some important, perhaps ...

An old black man stepped into the Tidewater Virginia street ...
just to let us pass ...

I was maybe 5 then ...

I stopped ...

asked my mom why he had done that. She jerked me away, nervously ...
ashamed, I think, that such a thing could ever “have” to be.

We had our own ball and chain ... Catholics,

one more thing NOT to be in the 1950s South.

But we were white, so we were OK, at least to live next door to,
not to talk to, or have over for a BBQ ...

I didn't care - I was 5 ... but I think it hurt my parents ...

I remember them telling us kids to be careful – about what I never knew.

The monastery was my decision, to be a priest, a missionary order ...

I loved the solitude, the silence. I wrapped myself in the cold chapel's echo,
assured I mattered in God's eyes ... and read from the lives of the saints ...
with a faint scent of incense and bee's wax perfuming the air.

What a time that was – '59 to '69 ...

JFK elected ... and murdered

Bobby spoke up ... and was shot ...

Martin did just about everything he could ... and was gunned down ...

Everything that seemed to matter in life ... rubbed out.

Four dead girls in Birmingham ... Selma, George Wallace ...

Civil Rights ... riots ... The Peace Corps ... Voting Rights ...

who ever thought voters' rights would be denied by the highest court in
the land? The South, for sure, has risen again!

I was drafted. Viet Nam.

In no time, I turned from a man-child into a thrice-arrested cynic,

all our institutions – church included – rotten to their core ...

business, so obviously corrupt, ran the show –

greed an ennobling principle ... ? Hah! Yea, right ...

Yes, I grew up into a man ... one I didn't always want to know. Even now ...